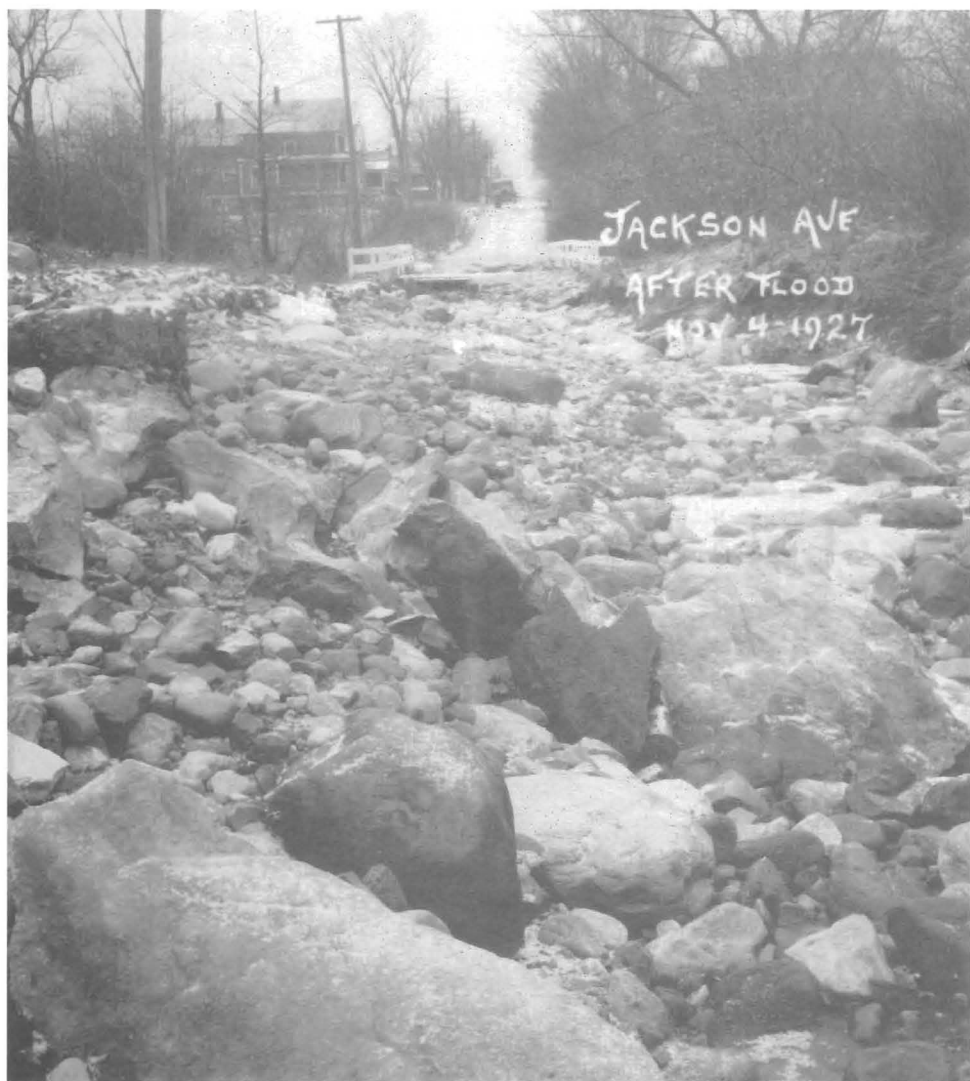


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**The Flood of 1927  
In Rutland: A Calendar**



*Jackson Avenue after the Flood, 4 November 1927, looking west.*

## About the Author

Jacob Sherman is the reference and technical services librarian at the Rutland Free Library. He also has served as Secretary of the Rutland Historical Society and is chairperson of its Publications Committee. His most recent contribution to the Society's publications was "Lost Structures of Old Rutland: A Calendar": *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 36 No. 4).

## Introduction

The November 1927 Flood, the worst natural disaster in the history of both Rutland and Vermont, was in many respects "the perfect storm." The groundwork for the catastrophe was laid during the previous month that had an unusually heavy rainfall, 50 per cent above normal. By the end of that October the ground was totally saturated. Between 2 and 4 November, two storm systems stalled over Vermont. **Beginning** at 9:40 P.M. on 2 November 8.47 inches of rainfall fell on Rutland during a 38-hour period. Considering that **eight inches** of rain over a square mile produces two million cubic feet of water, what happened becomes understandable. **Unable** to be absorbed by the sodden ground, the rain **quickly overwhelmed** usually placid creeks such as Moon and Tenney Brooks, turning them into torrents. Their waters **quickly collected** in low-lying areas such as the base of Gouger Hill [South Main Street] where hundreds of people were marooned on **upper floors** and had to be rescued. With the collapse of Glen Dam, East and Otter Creeks swelled to epic levels, their **raging waters** leaving an incredible path of destruction in Center Rutland and later in Proctor.

Few accounts of the impact of the 1927 flood on Rutland, Center Rutland and Proctor have the immediacy and power of that which appeared in a 1928 issue of *The Vermonter* [Vol. 33, No. 5], the predecessor of *Vermont Life*, in the form of a letter penned by an eyewitness who writes to her dear friend Esmerelda and signs herself "Alameda." The writer eloquently describes her arrival in Rutland on a mild day, the unexpected onset of the rain, the rapidly rising concern, and the realization that Rutland is facing the most serious crisis in its history. The account has been edited somewhat for length and is accompanied by memorable photos, many taken by Edward A. Chalmers of Rutland.

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# **The Flood of 1927 In Rutland: A Calendar**

Edited by Jacob Sherman

*An eyewitness account of the Flood of 1927  
in Rutland and Proctor.*

November 8, 1927

"With emotions of deep sorrow and with fingers so trembling with excitement that my handwriting may be almost illegible, I am attempting to write to you of the calamity that has occurred up here among the noble Green Mountains of our beloved Vermont - when our lovely valleys have been laid waste and our pleasant places made desolate. For the flood waters have swept over us, leaving destruction and suffering in their paths ....

"It was on a Wednesday, November second, that I journeyed up from Albany to spend a winter in this delightful city which was for several generations, the home of my fathers .... It was one of those beautiful days which often come in early November .... [Later, after my arrival at the paternal mansion and the conclusion of dinner], the stars were shining as we stepped out onto the broad verandah. To the east, the outlines of Killington, Pico and Shrewsbury were plainly visible even in the gathering gloom ....

"Evening was not far advanced when the patter of raindrops was heard on the walks. Scarcely could we believe our ears. Hastening to the door, one of the party exclaimed, 'It is actually raining, and raining heavily, too!' It was incredible, so calm and mild had been the day. Throughout the night the storm beat against my windows, and in the morning there was no indication that it would lessen.

"This being so, we settled ourselves for a long, quiet day. Occasionally someone would remark upon the quantity of water falling, but no alarm was manifested. A very small stream, known as Tenney Brook, flows nearby and, suddenly, we were amazed to note how rapidly it was rising. It quickly overspread and covered the bridge and the road to a depth far greater than is usual at the time of the Spring freshets. Seeing this, we wondered what the conditions might be in the lower parts of the city.

"At this juncture, a lady, who is a friend and neighbor of the family, hastened in and asked us to ride with her about town. 'Rutland is facing a serious flood disaster,' she exclaimed breathlessly. 'In fact, it is the most serious in the history of the city.' Hastily donning hats and coats we joined her, utterly unprepared for the scenes that awaited us.

"Boats were being paddled about on various streets and crews of men, the fire and police departments, together with many volunteers, were busily engaged in aiding families, that had become marooned, to escape from their flooded homes. Hundreds of fires, we learned, were extinguished, for water had filled the basements and, in many instances, was well above the first floors ....

"It was in the section of the city along Moon Brook, in the vicinity of South Main and Clover Streets and Strong's Avenue, that we visited first and it was from here that there came the first call for assistance. The aerial ladder of the fire truck was utilized in helping one family to safety, and in this family there were eight little children. The streets at these points were impassable. The tops of many automobiles could be seen in the water and, again, a great number of cars were entirely covered.

"Various reports reached us of conditions in the section around East Creek and, driving in that direction, we were told that many families were leaving their homes. Later, we were advised that 100 people were taken from their houses by members of the fire department and that whole companies of others left, unassisted, before high water made it an impossibility for them to do so.

"Preparations were made to house the refugees at the West Street Armory. A call was sounded for the National Guard .... Early in the evening the flood victims began to arrive, many of them young children who were taken in charge by the efficient Red Cross Nurse, Miss Mary Devlin. Men and women came, too, until nearly 300 were sheltered within its walls ....

"That night Rutland was in total darkness. Long unused kerosene lamps were rescued from garrets and attic chambers, and many a candle could be seen flickering on mantels, tables, and window sills. Train service was stopped, no trains having left the station since noon, and no bus service was possible after four o'clock. Hundreds of telephone lines were out of order. Not all the operators were able to get to work in the afternoon, owing to the fact that the streets in their neighborhoods were covered with a considerable depth of water ....

"The following morning the *Rutland Herald* made its appearance in greatly reduced form ... the usual 10 and 12 pages were shortened to four ....

"It was reported that nearly 20 bridges in and about Rutland had been demolished. Only one avenue out of the city was open and that, by way of the '76 Bridge on North Grove Street. Of the bridges swept away, one, Dorr Bridge, near the home of the Vermont poetess, the late Mrs. Julia C. R. Dorr, was a landmark, and being one of the old covered structures, was noted for its beauty. It had spanned the Otter Creek for 75 years and was one of the oldest bridges across the river. The bridge was 120 feet in length, supported by a pier in the middle. Not a timber was left of the venerable building.



*The Dorr Bridge was a Rutland landmark. Only a pier remained.*

"The Ripley bridge was carried away, the great Delaware and Hudson railroad trestle at Center Rutland, and the Clarendon and Pittsford Railroad bridge. The Adams Street bridge and a culvert over Tenney Brook on North Main Street were washed away.

"The residence of Mrs. Roger Reilly in Center Rutland was torn from its foundations and carried to meadows nearly a mile away where it was turned upside down.

"John Cebula, an employee of the Vermont Marble Company, lost his life by drowning Thursday night as he was aiding in rescue work. With a horse and wagon, two other men with him were endeavoring to reach householders who lived on the south side of the Otter Creek. The wagon was overturned by the rushing current and Mr. Cebula was carried downstream – the other men, being able to swim, escaped death ....

"Hundreds of people journeyed to Center Rutland to view the demolition of property. The scene was appalling. The great D. & H. trestle, already mentioned, had been swept

away by the tremendous rushing of waters. The falls reminded one of Niagara, and their noise was terrific. Shacks, belonging to the Vermont Marble Company, logs, sections of bridges, all manner of debris, were hurled along by the raging flood. Houses were half submerged and garages were floating away.

"Aeroplanes floated over the city, some of them being sent here by motion picture concerns and newspaper picture companies. These added to the sense of mystery and weirdness that enveloped the countryside.

"Everywhere in Rutland industries were silent. Nowhere was machinery running, an incident unparalleled here. There was no power to set the wheels turning, in fact, and in many instances, the plants themselves were flooded.

"The Vermont Hydro Electric Company met with countless loss. The Cleveland Avenue substation was flooded to a depth of six feet. Glen Dam went out and there was immense damage to transmission lines. The Manning Manufacturing Company, the Howe Scale Company, the Patch Manufacturing Company, and the Vermont Marble Company have all lost heavily.

"On Sunday afternoon we drove to Proctor, a beautiful village, six miles from Rutland. The town was so filled with visitors that all along the streets, a few rods apart, were stationed policemen, members of the National Guard, and Boy Scouts to keep traffic moving. Thousands of autos were in line.

"The damage done to Proctor is staggering, the Vermont Marble Corporation being the heaviest loser. The foundation of one of the old mills sank several feet at one end, and the building was so filled with water, covering machinery, that it is difficult to estimate the loss.

"Torrential waters rushed into the power plant of the company, carrying gravel, sand and stones in such quantities that machinery is clogged, and the town is without electricity until the debris can be removed.

"The village green, always so immaculately kept, is a sorry spectacle. It has been 15 feet under water. The railroad station is ruined. More than 50 families are homeless and fully 100 refugees, many of them children, are at the Proctor High School where Red Cross workers are looking out for them. Miss Emily Proctor is directing a corps of volunteer workers in relief measures.

"Powers Hill has been washed out to the extent that it can never be rebuilt. It is a fearsome sight. Four houses on the hill, together with their furnishings are gone, no one knows whither. The wedding presents of a bride and groom, just sent on from Montreal and not yet unpacked, went with the flood waters. Garages with their contents disappeared completely.

"The railroad is seriously crippled, the track in some



*The company power plant was filled with debris.*

instances being twisted out of shape. We saw a train of cars tipped over, lying on its side. [One amazing story was that of] Henry J. La Parle, an engineer, and Samuel J. Langill, a fireman, [who] were forced to spend the night on the top of their locomotive at a siding, because the whole of their freight train, with the exception of the engine's cab, was covered with water. They suffered intensely from exposure, and were taken to the Proctor Hospital after rescuers reached them by means of a raft ....

"It can be safely asserted that never before in the years of her statehood has Vermont experienced such a tremendous catastrophe as that which has just befallen her. Lives have been lost and millions of dollars worth of property, both public and private, have been destroyed. While some portions of the state have suffered far more heavily than have others, the whole commonwealth has been dealt a staggering blow. The homes of many, the businesses of others have been remorselessly wiped out. The whole situation is naught but tragedy ....

"Here, my dear Esmerelda, must I terminate my letter, with the half not yet told. It has been my endeavor not to magnify the actual conditions but, at the same time, I hope I have made you understand the full extent of the catastrophe that has befallen Rutland and Vermont."



*Water from Moon Brook standing at the bottom of Gouger Hill (South Main Street).*



# JANUARY 2008

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

		1  New Year's Day	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
18	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21  Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



*Water standing in Clover Street.*

# FEBRUARY 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6 Ash Wednesday	7	8	9
10	11	12 Lincoln's Birthday	13	14 Valentine's Day	15	16
17	18 President's Day	19	20	21	22 Washington's Birthday	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	



*An auto submerged in the waters on Strongs Avenue near Clover Street.*

# MARCH 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9  Daylight Savings Begins	10	11	12	13	14	15
16  Palm Sunday	17  St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20	21  Good Friday	22
23 Easter	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					



*Spruce Street looking south from River Street. The Beecher-Guthrie auto garage is at the extreme right.*

# APRIL 2008

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			



*Two men paddle their canoe in back of Mt. St. Joseph Academy near Rice Avenue. Frank Rice is in the rear seat.*



# MAY 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11 Mother's Day	12	13	14	15	16	17 Armed Forces Day
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 Memorial Day	27	28	29	30	31



*St. Peter's Field with the Kelly Tires billboard in the background.*

# JUNE 2008

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

Flag Day

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

Father's Day

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30



*The flooding East Creek between the Vermont Hydro garage on the east side and Lalor Lane on the west side.*

# JULY 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4 <small>Independence Day</small>	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



*The flooded highway bridge on the left and the trolley bridge on the right at Center Rutland.*

# AUGUST 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
						Battle of Bennington Day
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						



*A crowd views the waters of the flood as they pass Center Rutland and head down stream toward Proctor.*



# SEPTEMBER 2008

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

	1  Labor Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29  Rosh Hashanah	30				



*The Proctor Railroad Station at the height of the flood.*

# OCTOBER 2008

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

			1	2	3	4
5	6	7 Yom Kippur	8	9	10	11
12	13 Columbus Day	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31 Halloween	



*Downtown Proctor flooded. The camera is looking toward the store.*

# NOVEMBER 2008

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

						1
2  Daylight Savings Ends	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11  Veteran's Day	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23  30	24	25	26	27  Thanksgiving Day	28	29



*Flooded autos lie buried in the mud of a workman's neighborhood. Would they ever run again?*

# DECEMBER 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21 Hanukkah	22	23	24	25 Christmas Day	26	27
28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve			



*Powers Hill in Proctor where a wall of water carved its own path.*